



**JOINT READINESS TRAINING CENTER
AND FORT POLK
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
*News Release***

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Fort Polk ACUB Program begins

FORT POLK, La. - The Army and the Louisiana chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have signed a cooperative agreement that will ultimately help reduce training restrictions caused by endangered species management requirements at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

The agreement will also help Fort Polk, the Kisatchie National Forest and TNC to achieve common goals for recovery and conservation of endangered and at risk species.

The agreement was signed in May in support of the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program, which is the Army's program for implementing the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI). Under the ACUB program, TNC will purchase conservation easements or other land interests from willing landowners adjacent to Fort Polk to provide habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) and the Louisiana pine snake (LPS). The RCW and the LPS occur on Fort Polk and Kisatchie National Forest lands, as well as on some privately owned timberlands in the region.

"This is truly a win-win situation for everyone," said Brig. Gen. Daniel Bolger, commanding general of the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk. "It will provide our Soldiers with greater training flexibility and realism to better prepare them before they are deployed into combat operations."

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The general pointed out that TNC will benefit from the ACUB partnership “by receiving funding from the military for land conservation and endangered species and habitat protection.”

“Fort Polk and the Kisatchie National Forest can reach recovery goals sooner as RCW birds on private lands are included in the Vernon population,” Bolger said. “In addition, landowners who choose to participate in the program will receive financial compensation, can retain ownership of the property, and contribute to conservation.”

A key point is that participation by landowners is strictly voluntary, according to Rick Jacob, Director of Conservation Forestry for the Louisiana chapter of TNC. In addition, sustainable timber harvest and other traditional uses of the properties can continue.

He said TNC will contribute funds for the program that will be combined with funding provided by the Department of Defense.

“We are excited about it. This is the type of effort that provides so many benefits to all of our organizations,” Jacob said. “We can now begin work. The Army has already allocated some money to Fort Polk to get the ACUB program started right away.”

Jacob said the program will also “provide a very significant conservation benefit to the longleaf pine ecosystem.”

The RCWs occurring on Fort Polk and the adjacent Vernon Unit of the Kisatchie National Forest are considered a single population, so ACUB will ultimately help both agencies reach RCW recovery goals faster. The ACUB program will also conserve longleaf pine habitat needed by the LPS, which is a candidate for endangered species listing.

“I have always been excited about the relationship between Fort Polk and the Forest Service because our lands can be used to benefit the training of our Soldiers,” said Greta Boley, Forest Supervisor for the Kisatchie National Forest.

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“From a land management standpoint, the ACUB program is exceptional as we work with the Army and TNC to better manage habitat for the RCW and LPS,” she said.

Fort Polk officials emphasized that ACUB is not a program to purchase additional Army lands or acquire additional training ranges. However, it is an important tool to sustain Fort Polk’s mission by mitigating current and future constraints on Army training land use imposed by endangered species management requirements. The ACUB program will greatly enhance Fort Polk’s ability to accomplish the vital mission of providing the most realistic training possible for Soldiers, while supporting ecosystem conservation and local community needs and values.

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